

# THE SSA NEWS

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## Coming Soon!

- Mother's Day, May 11, 2003
- 6th Annual FaCT Conference, Building Collaboratives Mobilizing Communities, May 15, 2003
- Memorial Day, May 26, 2003



## FROM THE DIRECTOR'S DESK by Angelo Doti

Last month, I asked you to stay tuned for further details regarding Federal and State decisions affecting our programs. Activities have occurred but with little definitive action. One wonders what they are waiting for? Fall planting?

Washington still dabbles with a way-overdue TANF Reauthorization Bill (in fact Congress is overdue on all 13 funding bills to run the U.S. Government). What we know of the offering thus far, client work expectations would increase to full employment, for upward of 70% of

mandatory work participants, and all at no additional funds above the original 1996 funding level.

Sacramento seems no better. Many competing proposals are being deliberated in endless committee hearings but no policy or funding decisions are being made and the proponents are unyielding in their opposite entrenched positions. My guess, and yours is just as valid, is that they are waiting for tax receipt information from the April filing deadline to refine their May Budget Revision. Meanwhile, counties have proceeded to prepare very

preliminary budgets based on highly questionable estimates so we can plan for county budget hearings in early June.

So, we have been doing the annual budget shuffle while most of you have been providing meaningful direct or support services to our most needy and frail residents. Through your diligence in deliberate, accurate and caring actions, and our incredibly dedicated budget and policy planners, we will get through these trying times.

Oh, I did shed the "Interim" title last month.

## Update on Services Offered by Strategic Planning

by Michael Meyers, Program Manager, Strategic Planning Unit

With the many changes in recent months, many people have asked about the Economic and Community Partnerships (ECP) division. ECP had three programs that covered a wide variety of assignments. The **Strategic Planning Unit (SPU)**, **Families and Communities Together (FaCT)** and the **Community Linkages** program were all part of ECP. Their various assignments allowed SSA to accomplish many of its responsibilities by working with community organizations and with the different divisions within SSA. Much of what these programs do is relatively

invisible to staff, but the effects have been felt in the community.

Due to the many retirements and subsequent staffing needs throughout the Agency to support front line positions, the assignments and staff were recently reassigned to other divisions. While Community Linkages no longer exists as a separate program, but rather is handled by each division, both FaCT and Strategic Planning remain intact. FaCT handles coordination of SSA involvement with as many as 18 Family Resource Centers (FRC's). FaCT staff are also

involved in a variety of efforts pertaining to community-based services through the many contractors and other providers at the FRC's. SPU handles the Business Plan, Grand Jury Notebook, Volunteer Coordination, United Way involvement, Public Information, County Fair participation, legislation, and other tasks.

Many thanks goes out to the ECP staff who were involved in these changes, and to all SSA staff who have accepted changes and new assignments willingly. Your dedication is appreciated.

*“...most errors are the result of ‘failing to act correctly’ on information.”*

## Food Stamp Accuracy Update

Submitted by Ingrid Harita and Patsy Calvert

### SSA continues to move forward with Food Stamp corrective action efforts.

In March we launched an intense focus case review campaign. Supervisors and Program Integrity Coordinators (PICs) are focusing on the top four error prone areas: Income, Shelter/Utilities, Citizenship/Alien Status and Household Composition.

In addition, the Food Stamp Case Review form was revised to include Food Stamp dollars issued, dollar error amounts and the error factors that identify why an error occurred. All supervisors and PICs in Family Self-Sufficiency and Adult Services and Assistance Programs are now using this revised form.

Many of the case reviews will be completed prior to the issuance of benefits so errors found can be corrected immediately and not add to our error rate problem. Generally, case reviews reveal that most errors are the result of “failing to act correctly” on information. As we move forward in our attack on the Food Stamp error rate please remember to take the time to carefully review your work and the information provided by the client. Together we can and will make a difference in attaining at least a 92% accuracy rate, the anticipated Federal sanction tolerance level.

### Food Stamp Survey Results

On February 24<sup>th</sup> we sent out a second monthly Food Stamp survey. The survey included specific Food Stamp eligibility questions related to income. Those that responded by the due date of February 28<sup>th</sup> are to be commended. Your responses have helped us identify specific training needs. The overall accuracy on the survey was 76%. Final survey answers and helpful worker tools were sent out to all Food Stamp staff during the second week of April, and additional training on income and transitional budgeting concepts is being developed.

Since survey questions directly relate to Orange County’s error prone areas it is important that you use worker tools and any other resource materials when answering the questions. If you need additional worker tools or information please discuss this with your supervisor.

A new survey on a different topic will be sent out to all Food Stamp workers and supervisors the last Monday of every month. Thanks to everyone for your continued support of this new project.

*“Orientation sessions are on the last Tuesday of each month.”*

## Volunteers Needed!



Spring is here and potential volunteer opportunities are popping up! Strategic Planning Unit’s Volunteer Services holds monthly orientation sessions for people who are interested in giving back to the community by volunteering. On the last Tuesday of the month, representatives from Foster Care/Adoptions, CASA, CAST, Operation Santa Claus/Senior Santas & Friends, La CASA (Orangewood Children's Home Auxiliary), and Orangewood Children's Home make presentations on their programs and volunteer opportunities. The orientation sessions are from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at 888 North Main Street, Santa Ana. If you are interested in volunteering, please call Debbie Curnutt at (714) 245-6254 for a brochure.

## Blue Ribbon Celebration: Both Heartfelt and Inspirational

On April 2, 2003, The Raise Foundation (formerly Prevent Child Abuse Orange County) launched their annual campaign at the Bowers Museum. The month of April is designated Child Abuse Prevention Month and guests received blue ribbons to wear to symbolize this cause. Under sunny and clear skies, Raise Foundation's Executive Director Barbara Oliver, and Vice-Chair John Stratman expressed the continuing need for child abuse prevention. Sheriff Mike Carona emphasized the role of law enforcement in child abuse cases. The Sheriff introduced keynote speaker Erin Runnion, the mother of five-year-old Samantha, a child abuse and murder victim whose abduction received national media coverage. Ms. Runnion is an advocate for child abuse awareness and prevention since the death of her daughter.

The Sheriff's heartfelt introduction of Ms. Runnion and her inspirational words captured the essence of this special day. Fire Chief Chip Prather presented this year's Blue Ribbon awards to CAST advocate Jan Grotewald and to CAST's pediatric nurse practitioner, Jeanie Ming. Jan and Jeanie each received a beautiful crystal award to recognize their contributions in assisting child abuse victims. Dr. Michael Riley read the names of the five victims of child abuse who died in Orange County over the past year. As each name was read, a bell was rung in their memory. The event closed with each guest being given a live butterfly,



**Dr. Michael Riley, Director of Children and Family Services, addresses the crowd at the Blue Ribbon Campaign Kick-Off Event.**

kept in a small box. As the crowd opened the boxes, each brightly colored butterfly flew to the skies. This was symbolic of the spirits of the five children being set free.



*"Dr. Michael Riley read the names of the five victims of child abuse who died in Orange County over the past year."*



## United Way 2003 Campaign

The Social Services Agency United Way campaign's first 2003 meeting is scheduled for early in May. Currently, all SSA offices are recruiting volunteers to coordinate the site fundraisers, which range from selling chocolate and food items to turnaround bus

trips to Laughlin and State Line.

This will be an exciting year for SSA with many new fund-raising ideas, including some large stuffed animal gift baskets.

Last year SSA raised a total of \$15,637 from District office fundraising, chocolate sales and the Civic Center Kick-off event. SSA could not have done this without you! Thank you, and please continue to support the United Way campaign.

*"Thank you for volunteering."*

*“Approximately 1,200 participants received supportive services that enabled them to move into safe, affordable and permanent housing.”*

## CalWORKs Housing Services Program

The Social Services Agency (SSA) contracted with Orange County Housing and Community Development (H&CD), Housing Authority of the City of Santa Ana, Anaheim Housing Authority and Garden Grove Housing Authority to develop and deliver effective housing assistance services to CalWORKs families who have been approved for the Section 8 Voucher Program. SSA and the Housing Authorities developed the program to enhance and facilitate opportunities for families to locate and secure permanent affordable housing, thereby decreasing the primary barriers to job retention and self-sufficiency.

The services and resources provided to families included:

- One-time payment of past due rent.
- Partial or full security deposit.
- Payment of utility fees.
- Payment of up to \$600 each for the purchase of appliances.
- Outreach activities and counseling.
- Consumer credit and financial management counseling.

Participants' need for stable, affordable housing proved to be the major challenge in becoming self-sufficient. Some of the barriers have been low income, bad or no credit, prior evictions, homelessness, domestic abuse, substance abuse, large family size, and the ability to locate a unit. In addition, Orange County faced a rising rental market with low vacancy rates that provided another barrier in their ability to secure affordable housing.

The CalWORKs Housing Services Program provided over 830 security deposits and 385 payments for utility fees, move-in expenses and appliances. Approximately 1,200 participants received supportive services that enabled them to move into safe, affordable and permanent housing. A program participant said: ***“The services that I’ve received from the program have enabled my 8-year-old son and me to live adequately. We appreciate the service and give thanks for it. We wouldn’t have a refrigerator or the deposit money to move into a home if it weren’t for your help. I feel that this program is the best way to help a family in need.”*** Because of these services, many participants were able to move forward, obtain or advance in their employment and become self-sufficient. The impact of this program on assisting our families to self-sufficiency was dramatic and was highly visible during the period of time when it was most needed!

Due to the state budget reduction, the three year Housing Services Program contract had to end on August 2002. However, SSA's collaboration with the Housing Authorities, MAXIMUS and Affiliated Computer Services succeeded to preserve some elements of the program to currently assist participants with similar supportive services.

*“It will serve victims of abuse...”*

## Elder Abuse Forensic Center

Adult Protective Services is hosting the nation's first Elder Abuse Forensic Center at its offices in Santa Ana. The purpose of the Elder Abuse Forensic Center is to provide coordinated services to seniors and adults with disabilities who have been abused or neglected. It will serve victims of abuse by offering case review and action plans, in-home medical and mental status evaluations, in-home evidentiary investigation, education, training, and consultation. This is a collaborative effort between UCI College of Medicine, the District Attorney, the Sheriff and other law enforcement agencies, Older Adult Services (HCA Behavioral Health), the Public Guardian, Victim Witness, Human Options, and the Council on Aging, supported with a grant from the Archstone Foundation. It has been very exciting for all of the staff involved to be able to participate in such an innovative project.

## Concurrent Planning

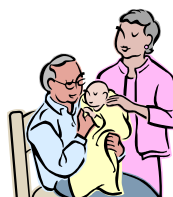
In the not so distant past, children who were victims of abuse and neglect often languished in foster care for years. While the issues are complex, one component of the problem was parents were often given extended periods of time, sometimes years, to reunify. Consequently, children were often moved multiple times from foster home to foster home until it was determined they could be adopted. At this point the child was often older and may have developed issues that made them harder to place.

Several years ago, in response to the plight of these children,

Federal Legislation was enacted that allows for what is known as Concurrent Planning. Concurrent Planning says that for families whose children are made dependents of the Juvenile Court, two separate plans are made simultaneously--one for reunification and one for permanency. Should reunification fail, there is an alternate plan in place. In situations where reunification is unlikely, children are placed in Concurrent Planning homes. These homes have adoption home studies completed, are matched to the specific children, hold foster care licenses and are prepared to

make a permanent commitment. While the goal is always reunification, should these efforts fail, the child is already in a home willing to adopt.

In 2002, 66 children were placed in Concurrent homes. In 2003 to date, 22 children have been placed. These placements have resulted in many adoptions and much less trauma for many children.



*“Concurrent planning says that for families whose children are made dependents of the Juvenile Court, two separate plans are made simultaneously--one for reunification and one for permanency.”*

## Requirements Met For CWS/CMS Funding

When the State of California augmented the Child Welfare Service funding to counties to implement a reduced caseload, the State required that counties must fully utilize the State-mandated Child Welfare Services Case Management System. This means that a critical funding source for SSA's Social Workers in our

Children and Family Services Division is available only if our workers fully utilize this system.

On January 3, 2003, the State Department of Social Services approved the release of \$2,786,460 to SSA because the agency has certified that CWS/CMS is being fully

utilized. We were able to make that certification because it is a clear expectation and best practice in our Children and Family Services Division. This funding was included in our budget as part of the money to finance salaries and benefits in Children and Family Services.

*“...the State required that counties must fully utilize the State-mandated CWS/CMS in order to obtain that funding.”*

## California Welfare Information Network Project Delay

The Welfare Case Data System Consortium has delayed the beginning of the pilot from February 2003 to February 2004 to allow time to incorporate a number of recent regulatory changes, including Quarterly Reporting/Prospective Budgeting for CalWORKs and Food Stamps. An assessment of the overall readiness of the CalWIN application was completed, looking at workaround and training perspectives. The recommendation of the report suggested including the time

and resources necessary to incorporate pending policy changes, prior to starting the first pilot.

In Orange County, this moves the implementation date from October 2004 to September 2005. It is important to note that the implementation date has moved, but many other aspects of the project continue on schedule. Several committees/work-groups are working on defining our future way of doing business when

using CalWIN. It is critical that this work continues. Once these critical issues are defined, the long process of making changes to the policies and procedures to incorporate the recommended changes will begin.

We appreciate the time to get ready in the best manner possible, and to receive a system that determines eligibility according to these important ever changing regulations.

*“It is important to note that the implementation date has moved but many other aspects of the project in Orange County continue on schedule.”*



We welcome your input regarding this newsletter. For information on submitting articles, contact Debbie Kroner at (714) 541-7734  
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Visit our web site  
[www.oc.ca.gov/ssa/](http://www.oc.ca.gov/ssa/)



- \* Articles for the May issue of The SSA NEWS are due by May 5, 2003!
- \* Please limit your articles to 225 words maximum and send them via email. Thanks.



## KUDOS

### Hong-Ngoc Ton-That, Eligibility Technician, General Relief/Food Stamp Intake.

"This is the best government agency that I've dealt with because the people have been so nice to me. My worker was very helpful and very nice to me." (Sent by an applicant, forwarded by Dinah Torgerson, Assistant Program Manager, Adult Services and Assistance Programs and Mary Wuerfl, Deputy Director, Adult Services and Assistance Programs.)

### Dorothy Solorzano, Receptionist, Braden Court.

"Please receive this note to let you know how much I appreciate Dorothy Solorzano at Braden Court reception. We are conducting a major EEO training for all of our county managers and supervisors (about 3,500 people) between March and May. As you can imagine, there is much preparation involved with a project of this size. In order to get ready for the participants, it is necessary to set out the sign-in books and workbooks, make sure our presenter has the portable microphone, and answer questions from participants as they arrive. I spend some time at the site in the morning and then go back to the office to attend to daily activities. Dorothy has willingly and cheerfully assumed responsibility for the above-mentioned tasks and she "cleans up" after the afternoon session by placing the sign-up binders and unused training materials in a safe place. I really appreciate Dorothy. Her willingness to assist in this critical training project saved me untold hours and I always feel very confident that Dorothy will get the job done." (Sent by Bart Bartlett, County EEO Access Office, forwarded by Susan Miller, Program Manager Children and Family Services/Operations and Support Services and Glorious Lawrence, Deputy Director, Children and Family Services.)

### John Le, Senior Social Worker, Orangewood Children's Home.

"It would be impossible to convey with words how I feel. But, thank you, John, and to the staff at the reception desk ("Grandpa" is just one). The staff of caring people at "Control," the nurses dispensing medicine, his counselor, his psychiatrist, etc. Also, thanks to the volunteers for outside trips that helped keep him learning how to cope with real life. I am hoping that someday in his future, he will reach out to change the life of someone just like himself. Thank you again. Please post this so everyone can see." (Sent by a client's mother, forwarded by Gary Taylor, Program Manager II, Orangewood Children's Home.)

### Electronic Benefit Transfer Project Management and Workgroup Staff.

"I wanted to write about my experience with the Go Live Support aspect of the implementation of EBT for Orange County. I came to Orange County in the middle of February and then in March to assist with Go Live Support needs. On both occasions, staff was very well prepared. The most significant time period was in March when the county went into full operation. The first of the month fell on a Saturday and the cash stagger was spread across the first three days of the month. Orange County staff needed to be prepared to assist all cash clients the first day they were open for business. I found that the support documentation was well prepared and I was welcomed by the well-trained staff at the ARC office. I would venture to say that this one of the best implementations of EBT in a county since the project began. Your clients were well served during this conversion and I can only believe based on the work ethic of your staff, that they will be well served in the future using EBT and all other services you offer to the community." (Sent by Martin Tenesch, State EBT Project Manager, forwarded by Rick Shigaki, Deputy Director of Technology Services and Patsy Calvert, Director, Family Self-Sufficiency.)

### Joanne Munro, Senior Social Services Supervisor, Children and Family Services/Quality Assurance.

"I am on assignment from CalSWEC at the moment, and part of this job is interviewing Program Coordinators about their mentoring programs. I recently interviewed Joanne Munro (as well as reviewed program documents), and from my perspective the program is very likely the longest standing and the best run program in the state. It really could be a model and an inspiration for other agencies that want to develop mentoring programs." (Sent by Jerry Sherk, consultant in the mentoring industry to former director, Larry Leaman. Forwarded by David Miller, Program Manager, Children and Family Services/Quality Assurance.)